

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T LONDON 3324

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, US, UG, UK
SUBJECT: US CITIZENS IN UGANDA

REF: STATE 043284

1. FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF REFTEL, EMBOFF HAD EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION WITH PETER ROSLING, ASSISTANT HEAD OF FCO EAST AFRICAN DEPARTMENT. (FCO HAS BEEN UNABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER HENNESSEY, WHO IS PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE TO CAPETOWN, IS INDEED IN LONDON THIS WEEKEND.)

2. ACCORDING TO ROSLING, WHO HAS WORKED CLOSELY ON UGANDAN MATTERS FOR THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, BRITISH SEE AMIN AS AN ARMY SERGEANT WHO RUNS UGANDA AS THOUGH IT WERE ONE VAST PARADE GROUND. AMIN IS NOT PARTICULARLY INTELLIGENT, BUT HE DOES HAVE CONSIDERABLE PLEASANT CUNNING; "HE IS A CRAFTY BUGGER". DEVOTED TO THE TRAPPINGS OF POWER, AMIN IS BOTH CONSCIOUS AND PROUD OF THE FACT THAT HE HAS MADE HIMSELF A WORLD FIGURE.

3. ROSLING SHARES REFTEL PARA 2 ASSUMPTION THAT A SHOW OF FORCE, PARTICULARLY IF IT WERE IN THE FORM OF SABER RATTLING, WOULD NOT BE LIKELY TO INTIMIDATE AMIN AND COULD WELL BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. SINCE HE SEES HIMSELF
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PRIMARILY AS A MILITARY LEADER, AMIN CAN PROFESSIONALLY ADMIRE A QUICK, CLEAN, AND SUCCESSFUL MILITARY OPERATION (CF. ENTEBBE), BUT THIS ADMIRATION APPLIES TO AFTER THE FACT APPRECIATION OF A FAIT ACCOMPLI. WHETHER OR NOT A SHOW OF FORCE WOULD ACTUALLY TRIGGER REPRISALS IS A MORE DIFFICULT QUESTION: ORDERS FOR MASS EXECUTIONS ARE NOT LIKELY, BUY UGANDAN SECURITY AUTHORITEES OFTEN

OPERATE UNDER VERY LOOSE CONTROL, AND IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT INDIVIDUAL OFFICIAL(S) MIGHT INSTIGATE REPRISALS ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE. IN THIS CONTEXT, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT WHILE THE BRITHSH HAVE BEEN THROUGH SOME VERY HAIRY TIMES WITH AMIN, THE LIFE OF ONLY ONE BRITISH SUBJECT (MRS. DORA BLOCH) HAS BEEN LOST. THIS OBSERVATION SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, WITH THE IMPORTANT CAVEAT THAT DIFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES, BOTH IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM, WERE IN FORCE WHEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN CITIZENS WERE UNDER THE GUN. IT MAY BE RELEVANT TO NOTE THAT AMIN HAS ALWAYS PRIDED HIMSELF ON BEING A LOYAL SERVANT OF THE QUEEN, AND HE MAY THEREFORE SENSE A RESPONSIBILITY TO BRITISH SUBJECTS WHICH WOULD NOT APPLY TO AMERICANS.

4. FURTHER TO REFTEL PARA2, WE DISCUSSED WITH ROSLING THE QUESTION OF POSSIBLE INTERMEDIARIES WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE AMIN OR OFFER USEFUL ADVICE ON DEALING WITH HIM. OF THOSE NAMES LISTED REFTLE, ROSLING FELT THE BEST BETS WOULD BE THE SOMALIS, THE OAU (ETEKI WOULD PORBABLY BE MORE USEFUL THAN RAMGOOLAN), AND MOBUTU.

ROSLING SAID HE COULD NOT EVALUATE THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF BOKASSA (CAE), RWANDA, OR THE PRESIDENTS OF SUDAN, SYRIA, AND EGYPT, BUT INDICATED THAT THE US WOULD HAVE LITTLE IF ANYTHING TO LOSE BY CONSULTING WITH THESE. ROSLING POINTEDLY SUGGESTED THAT WE MIGHT WISH TO CONSULT WITH THE SAUDIS, WHO HAVE CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE WITH AMIN ON BOTH RELIGIOUS AND FINANCIAL GROUNDS. WHEN WE RAISED THE MANE OF COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL
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RAMPHAL, ROSLING SAID THAT THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY OVER AMIN'S ATTENDANCE AT THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING MAY LEAD RAMPHAL TO DUCK THIS USSUE.

5. ROSLING FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO GUESS AT WHICH POINT THIRD-PARTY APPROACHES TO AMIN "MIGHT BECOME COUNTERPRODUCTIVE, "BUT SUGGESTED THAT OUR OWN APPROACHES TO SUCH POTENTIAL INTERMEDIARIES BE UNDERTAKEN, AT LEAST INITIALLY, AS "CONSULTATIONS" RATHER THAN AS DIRECT REQUESTS FOR DEMARCHES TO AMIN.

6. SPECULATING ON NEXT MONDAY'S COMMAND APPEARANCE BEFORE AMIN OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN UGANDA, ROSLING RECALLED THAT THE BRITISH COMMUNITY HAD BEEN THE SUBJECT OF SUCH A MASS SUMMONS. AGAIN ONTING THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES WERE NOT IDENTICAL, ROSLING OBSERVED THAT THANKS IN NO SMALL PART TO THE SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS BY SOME "OLD UGANDA HANDS" AMONG THEM TO KEEP THE COMMUNITY CALM AND COOL, THE MEETING HAD TURNED OUT TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN

A PUBLIC RELATIONS PERFORMANCE BY THE AVUNCULAR AMIN:
ROSLING OPINED THAT MONDAY'S SESSION MIGHT WEEE BE A
SIMILAR SHOW.

7. SUMMING UP, ROSLING SAID THERE WAS LITTLE DOUBT THAT
AMIN ENJOYED HUMILIATING THOSE WHO HE BELIEVED TO HAVE
OFFENDED HIM. AT LEAST AS FAR AS NON-AFRICAN FOREIGNERS
WERE CONCERNED, SUCH HUMILIATION PROBABLY DID NOT EXTEND
TO THE TAKING OF ANY SADISTIC PLEASURE IN THE INFLICTION
OF PHYSICAL PAIN OR DEATH. ROSLING COMMENTED, HOWEVER,
THAT AMIN WAS "A BRUTAL MAN IN A RATHER BRUTAL PART OF
THE WORLD" AND WARNED THAT THE ONLY PREDICTABLE THING
ABOUT HIM WAS HIS UNPREDICTABILITY. THE BRITISH AGREE
WITH US THAT THE BEST TYPE OF RELATIONS WITH AMIN IS
NO RELATIONS, BUT THEY RECOGNIZE THAT WE, LIKE TYEY,
CANNOT TURN OUR BACKS ON OUR CITIZENS IN UGANDA REGARD-
LESS OF HOW MANY TIMES IN THE PAST THESE CITIZENS MAY
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HAVE BEEN URGED TO DEPART. THEREFORE, WHEN FORCED INTO
DEALING WITH AMIN, THE BRITISH HAVE FOUND THE BEST POLICY
TO BE TO GRIT THEIR TEETH, SWALLOW THEIR PRIDE IF NEEDS
BE, AND TRY TO KEEP THE SITUATION AND THEMSELVES AS COOL
AS POSSIBLE.

8. EITHER ROSLING OR HIS IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR, FCO
EAST AFRICAN DEPARTMENT HEAD MARTIN EWANS, WOULD BE
PLEASED TO DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS FURTHER WITH AF/E
DIRECTOR POST IF THE LATTER BELIEVES DIRECT CONTACT WOULD
BE USEFUL. THEY SUGGEST THAT AT LEAST INITIALLY,
ORDINARY TELEPHONE CIRCIUTS WOULD SUFFICE. DURING THE
WEEKEND, ROSLING CAN BE REACHED ON (01) 399-4432 RPT
(01) 399-4432 SINCE HE IS DEPARTMENTAL DUTY OFFICER FOR
THE WEEKEND, ROSLING WILL NOT BE AWAY FROM THIS TELEPHONE
FOR ANY MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES AT A TIME. EWANS WILL
BE AVAILABLE ON (970 3737 RPT (970) 3737 IN SURRY
THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND WITH THE EXCEPTION OF 1930-2400
(LONDON TIME) SATURDAY EVENING; DURING THIS PERIOD, HE
CAN BE CONTACTED AT (01) 876-6688 RPT (01) 876-6688ARMSTRONG

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